DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 358 309 CE 063 849

TITLE Working Mothers and Their Children. Facts on Working Women No. 89-3.
INSTITUTION Women's Bureau (DOL), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE Aug 89
NOTE 9p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Black Mothers; *Children; Day Care; Early Parenthood; *Employed Parents; Employer Attitudes; *Employment Level; *Employment Patterns; Hispanic Americans; Income; Marital Status; *Mothers; Poverty; Tables (Data); Whites

ABSTRACT

In 1988, 65% of mothers with children under the age of 18 were in the labor force. Regardless of marital status, mothers are very active in the labor force and contribute significantly to family income. On average, female-headed households earned 56% of the amount married-couple families earn. Families maintained by women represented 52% of all families below the poverty level in 1987. Mothers were most likely to be employed if divorced (75.1%) or in married-couple families (61.9%). Regardless of marital status, mothers with older children were more likely to be employed than were mothers with younger children. The labor force activity of the nearly 10 million mothers with children under 3 has increased substantially from 1978 to 1988 (from 39.1 to 52.5%). As of 1988, most of the country's nearly 600,000 teenage mothers had not completed high school and had an overall unemployment rate of 39.4%. A 1987 nationwide Bureau of Labor Statistics survey reported that 11% of establishments with 10 or more employees provided direct day care benefits and about three-fifths provided at least some indirect day care benefits (in the form of work schedule or leave policies). (MN)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED358309

Facts on Working Women

U.S. Department of Labor
Women's Bureau

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

No. 89-3
August 1989
(Reprinted January 1993)

WORKING MOTHERS AND THEIR CHILDREN

One of the most significant trends in the United States labor force has been the growth of working mothers. In March 1988 there were nearly 33 million women who had children under the age of 18. Most of these mothers are now participants in the labor force – 65 percent. Whether in married-couple families or families maintained by single parents, approximately 34 million children had mothers who were working or seeking employment.

Employment Status of Women 16 Years and Over By Presence and Age of Own Children, March 1988

(Numbers in thousands)

	Total	Total With Own Children Under 18	With Children Under 6	With Children Under 3
Total	96,516	33,098	15,812	9,451
In Labor Force	53,987	21,528	8,865	4,959
Labor Force Participation Rate	55.9	65.0	56.1	52.5
Employed	51,027	20,132	8,104	4,492
Full time	37,448	14,682	5,628	3,067
Part time	13,579	5,450	2,476	1,425
Unemployed	2,960	1,396	761	467
Unemployment Rate	5.5	6.5	8.6	9.4

Source: U.S. Department of Labor: Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Current Population Survey," March 1988.

CE 063 849

Currently, mothers are returning to work sooner after giving birth than ever before. As recently as 1983, mothers with children 1 year old or younger only participated in the labor force at 44.0 percent. By March 1988, a majority of mothers of infants (1 year old or younger) were labor force participants (50.8 percent).

Nearly 2 out of every 3 mothers with children under age 18 were in the labor force in March 1988. In 1977 less than half of all children under age 18 had mothers who were employed or seeking employment. A decade later, 6 out of 10 children under age 18 had mothers in the labor force.

FAMILY INCOME AND POVERTY STATUS

Regardless of marital status, mothers are very active in the labor force and contribute significantly to family income. Over half of all mothers are employed and 73 percent of those who are employed are working full time. In 1987 married couple families with 2 children had a median income of $36,807, while female headed households with 2 children had a median income figure of only $11,257.

Most mothers are in married-couple families (75.5 percent). The remainder are divorced (9.4 percent); single, never married (8.1 percent); married, spouse absent (5.4 percent); and widowed (1.6 percent).

Among householders who work year round, full time, female householders have the lowest median income and earn, on average, 56 percent of what married-couple families earn.

The high school graduation rate for female householders below the poverty level was 42.4 percent for Hispanics,[1] 47.9 percent for Blacks and 55.2 percent for Whites. These two factors contribute greatly to the extremely high poverty rate of female headed households which was 34.3 percent in 1987.

Families maintained by women represented over half (52 percent) of all families below the poverty level in 1987. Within these families resided 7.1 million related children under age 18. The average number of children in families maintained by women that were below the poverty level in 1986 was 2.2.

MARITAL STATUS

The marital status of mothers has much to do with their unemployment rate. Mothers are more likely to be employed if they are divorced (75.1 percent) or in married couple families (61.9 percent). Mothers who are least likely to be employed are those who are married with spouses absent, widowed, or have never married. Only 46.7 percent of these mothers were working as of March 1988.

---

[1] Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

Unemployment for mothers in married couple families was only 4.8 percent in March 1988 and only 6.3 percent for divorced mothers. Both figures were lower than the 6.5 percent overall unemployment rate for all mothers in March 1988. Other mothers have not fared as well. Those who have never married, widowed mothers, and married mothers with absent spouses have respective unemployment rates of 22.1 percent, 11.6 percent, and 11.2 percent in March 1988.

There are approximately 8.2 million divorced women in the United States. Three million have children under age 18. Most divorced women are over age 35 and have children above preschool age—3.8 million children between ages 6 and 17 and only 868,000 preschoolers.

With 80 percent of divorced mothers in the labor force and with 3 out of every 4 working, they are more likely to be employed than any other marital group. Eighty-eight percent of employed divorcees are full-time workers. Their March 1988 unemployment rate of 6.3 percent was second lowest to mothers in married-couple families.

There are only 543,000 widowed mothers nationwide. They have the smallest number of children (794,000) among all marital types mainly because widows are the oldest group of women. Nearly 3 out of every 4 are age 65 and over. Of the 11 million widows in the United States, only 5 percent have children under age 18 and less than 1 percent have children under 6 years of age.

Single (never married) mothers have the highest unemployment rate of all mothers. At 22.1 percent, the unemployment rate is nearly double that of widowed mothers (11.6 percent) and almost five times that of mothers in married-couple families (4.8 percent). Since 1975, however, the labor force participation rate of single mothers has increased from 41.7 percent to 51.6 percent in 1988.

Single mothers are the youngest marital group with a median age of 23.1 years. They also have the largest number of preschoolers among families maintained by women (1.5 million). Even though Black women comprise only 19 percent of the single women in this country, a disproportionate 59 percent (1.6 million) of all single mothers are Black.

Whatever the marital status of the mother, those with older children are more likely to be in the labor force than those with younger children—especially preschoolers. In families maintained by women, there are a total of 11.4 million children under age 18.

MOTHERS WITH CHILDREN UNDER AGE 6

The 16 million mothers with children under age 6 represent nearly half (48 percent) of the mothers with children under age 18. Their 56.1 percent labor force participation rate is impressive but still lower than the 73.0 percent of mothers with children age 6 and over. Most mothers of preschoolers are married with their spouses present—12.2 million or 77.1 percent. The remainder are single, never married (11.7 percent), divorced (5.4 percent), married with spouse absent (5.3 percent), and widowed (0.5 percent).

There are 45 millon children living in married-couple families—16 million are under age 6. Of the 4 million children under age 6 living in single-parent households, 3.3 million live with single-parent mothers. Less than half of these children have mothers who are employed.

MOTHERS WITH CHILDREN UNDER AGE 3

There are nearly 10 million mothers with children under age 3. Most are in married-couple families (79 percent). The remainder are single, never married (13 percent); married, spouse absent (5 percent); divorced (3 percent); and widowed (0.3 percent).

Their labor force activity has increased substantially from 39.1 percent in 1978 to 52.5 percent in 1988. This increase resulted mostly from the entrance of many married mothers into the labor force. During this same time period, wives with children age 1 year or younger have increased their labor force participation by 50 percent.

Unemployment is quite high among these mothers who are female householders—widowed (33.6 percent); single, never married (28.2 percent); married with spouse absent (12.9 percent); and divorced (11.7 percent). Mothers in married couple families had a single digit unemployment rate of 6.8 percent in March 1988.

Labor Force Participation Rates of Wives and Women Who Maintain Families By Age of Youngest Child Under 3, March 1988

Family Status of Mother	Age of Youngest Child: 1 Year or Younger	2 Years	3 Years
1988			
Total Mothers	50.8	60.3	59.3
Wives	51.9	61.7	59.3
Women Maintaining Families	44.9	52.5	59.0
1983			
Total Mothers	44.8	51.1	56.3
Wives	44.6	50.4	56.1
Women Maintaining Families	44.0	54.6	57.2
1978			
Total Mothers	35.7	47.0	48.0
Wives	34.8	45.6	47.0
Women Maintaining Families	43.2	54.4	53.2

Source: U. S. Department of Labor: Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Current Population Survey," March 1988.

TEENAGE MOTHERS

Currently, teenage mothers between the ages of 16 to 19 total nearly 600,000. Many have not completed high school while others may still be enrolled in school. Teenage mothers without help and motivation are less likely to be employed or to be seeking employment. In March 1988, they had an unemployment rate of 39.4 percent and slightly more than one-third (37.1 percent) were labor force participants. Unemployment was particularly high among Black teenage mothers at 48.8 percent.

The majority of teen mothers have never been married. Only 32 percent were married as of March 1988. For financial support, many may have to rely upon their families, relatives, and Federal or State assistance programs.

Half of all Hispanic and non-Hispanic White teen mothers are not in married-couple families. Ninety-five percent of Black teenage mothers are not married. Only 8,000 of the 216,000 Black teenage mothers (4 percent) are in married-couple families, compared with 51 percent of Hispanic teenage mothers and 48 percent of non-Hispanic White teenage mothers.

Labor Force Status of Teenage Mothers, 16 to 19 Years of Age, by Race, March 1988 (Numbers in thousands)

	Total Population	Labor Force	Labor Force Participation Rate	Total Employed	Unemployment Rate
Total	576	214	37.1	129	39.4
White	349	126	36.1	84	33.6
Black	216	84	39.1	43	48.8
Hispanic	101	35	34.3	24	32.1

Source: U.S. Department of Labor: Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Current Population Survey," March 1988.

BLACK, WHITE, AND HISPANIC MOTHERS

Black and White mothers with children under the age of 18 are more likely to be in the labor force than are Hispanic mothers. Black and White mothers participated in the labor force at rates of 66.3 percent and 65.1 percent, respectively, while Hispanic mothers participated at a rate of 51.7 percent. White mothers between the ages of 35 and 44 are most likely to be in the labor force – the peak participation age range for Black and Hispanic mothers is 25 to 34.

The unemployment rate for Black mothers of preschoolers (20.4 percent) is more than twice that of Hispanic mothers (8.3 percent) or White mothers (7.2 percent). In fact, Black mothers had the highest unemployment rates no matter the ages of their children. The majority of employed mothers in the United States are working full time. Eighty-five percent of employed Black mothers worked full time as compared with 78 percent of Hispanic mothers and 70 percent of White mothers.

Labor Force Participation Rates of Mothers with Teenage and Preschool Children, by Race, March 1988

	Mothers With Teenage Children Ages 14-17	Mothers With Preschool Children Under 6
Total	74.5	56.1
White	74.6	56.0
Black	73.0	58.4
Hispanic	60.5	45.6

Source: U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Current Population Survey," March 1988.

EMPLOYERS' REACTIONS TO CHILD CARE

As more mothers enter the labor force and find employment, the issues of child care and the needs of working parents have taken on heightened prominence. The social and political aspects of child care have fostered much debate from all arenas.

Problems that employees face in arranging care for their children may result in absenteeism, tardiness, low morale, and productivity problems. The continued reliance of women in the work force is expected to influence more employers to expand or adjust their personnel and benefits policies to meet the needs of the changing labor force.

During the summer of 1987, the Bureau of Labor Statistics conducted a nationwide survey of approximately 10,000 business establishments and Federal agencies to determine what type of child care services they provided their employees.

Eleven percent of the establishments with 10 or more employees reported that they provided such direct benefits as employer-sponsored day care; assistance with child care costs; information and referral to community child care resources; counseling services; and a variety of miscellaneous benefits.

About three-fifths of the establishments reported that at least some of their employees could take advantage of indirect benefits in the form of work schedule or leave policies that could aid them in fulfilling their family obligations. Some examples would include flexitime, flexible leave, and voluntary shifts to part-time work schedules.

Employment Status of Women 16 Years Old and Over With Children 18 Years Old and Under, March 1988 (Numbers in thousands)

All Women	Total Mothers	Married Spouse Present	Married Spouse Absent	Divorced	Never Married
Total	33,098	24,978	1,775	3,120	2,682
Labor Force	21,528	16,225	1,095	2,500	1,385
Participation Rate	65.0	65.0	61.7	80.1	51.6
Employed	20,132	15,452	971	2,344	1,078
Unemployed	1,396	773	123	156	307
Unemployment Rate	6.5	4.8	11.2	6.3	22.1
White Women					
Total	27,055	21,965	1,125	2,568	1,041
Labor Force	17,603	14,087	707	2,062	530
Participation Rate	65.1	64.1	62.8	80.3	50.9
Employed	16,701	13,466	645	1,939	451
Unemployed	902	621	62	123	78
Unemployment Rate	5.1	4.4	8.8	6.0	14.8
Black Women					
Total	4,780	1,981	585	472	1,593
Labor Force	3,170	1,505	361	379	839
Participation Rate	66.3	76.0	61.7	80.4	52.7
Employed	2,712	1,377	303	348	616
Unemployed	458	128	58	31	223
Unemployment Rate	14.5	8.5	16.0	8.2	26.6
Hispanic Women					
Total	3,221	2,248	282	286	348
Labor Force	1,665	1,183	131	193	134
Participation Rate	51.7	52.6	46.5	67.4	38.7
Employed	1,547	1,105	113	183	125
Unemployed	118	78	18	11	9
Unemployment Rate	7.1	6.6	13.8	5.4	6.9

Source: U. S. Department of Labor: Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Current Population Survey," March 1988.

THE WOMEN'S BUREAU WORK AND FAMILY CLEARINGHOUSE

In January 1989, the Women's Bureau opened its **Work and Family Clearinghouse.** The main purpose of the clearinghouse is to assist employers in identifying the most appropriate policies for responding to the dependent care (child and/or eldercare) needs of employees who are seeking to balance their dual responsibilities.

Information and guidance are available to employers through telephone discussion and written materials on five broad option areas: **direct services; information services; financial assistance; flexible policies; and public-private partnerships.**

Available information includes **Program Profiles** which describe employer-related child and eldercare systems already in place; technical assistance concerning National and State information sources, bibliographic references, conference information, research and statistics; and **How to Guides** for employers' use in about 26 areas, such as **On/Off Site Centers, Family Day Care, Resource and Referral, Flexible Leave Policies, Maternity Leave,** etc.

A **Work and Family Resource Kit** is also available to assist employers, unions and others interested in the full-range of work and family programs. Single copies may be obtained by sending a self-addressed label to the Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor, 200 Constitution Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20210.

The Work and Family Clearinghouse can be reached by calling 1-800-827-5335.

This material will be available to sensory impaired individuals upon request. Voice phone: 202-219-6652; TDD (Telecommunications Device for the Deaf) phone: 1-800-326-2577